

# The MESSENGER

of  
OUR  
LADY  
of  
AFRICA



Published by the White Sisters, Metuchen, N. J.

MAY - JUNE, 1944

VOL. 6

No. 8

# CONGREGATION OF THE MISSIONARY SISTERS OF OUR LADY OF AFRICA (White Sisters)

**ORIGIN AND AIM:** The Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa was founded in 1869 by Cardinal Lavigerie, to rescue, moralize and regenerate the pagan and Mohammedan woman, and through her attain the family and society. Exclusively vowed to the Apostolate in Africa, the Sisters devote their lives to the natives in every work of mercy and charity . . . Catechetical, Medical, Educational.

## GOVERNMENT AND APPROBATION:

The Congregation is governed by a Superior General who depends directly on the Holy Sec. The Constitutions were definitely approved by decree the 14th of December 1909 and promulgated on the 3rd of January 1910.

**SPIRIT:** The Spirit of the Congregation is one of obedience, humility, simplicity, and zeal; and the life of the Sisters one of poverty, mortification and labor.

\* \* \* \*

The Congregation numbers over 1,500 Professed Sisters who are devoting their lives to the Natives in 120 Missions, that spread out through—

North Africa: Algeria, Tunisia, Atlas Mountains, Sahara.

West Africa: The Gold Coast, French West Africa.

East Africa: Kenya, Nyassaland, Tanganyika, Uganda, Rhodesia, Belgian Congo, Rwanda, Urundi.

\* \* \* \*

OUR AMERICAN HOME IS AT:

White Sisters Convent  
319 Middlesex Avenue  
Metuchen, New Jersey

## THE MESSENGER OF

### OUR LADY OF AFRICA

is edited and published bi-monthly with ecclesiastical approbation by the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa (White Sisters), Metuchen, New Jersey. Annual subscription \$1.00. Entered as second class matter December 15, 1931, at the post office of Metuchen, New Jersey, under the Act of March 3, 1879.

## SPIRITUAL ADVANTAGES

Three Masses are said monthly for the living and deceased benefactors of the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa. Moreover, they share in the prayers and apostolic labors of over fifteen hundred White Sisters, who are working in the African Missions; and in the prayers and acts of self denial that the Natives, so willingly, offer up daily for their benefactors.

## TO AVOID THE MISSIONS

### UNNECESSARY EXPENSE,

kindly notify us immediately of a change of address. If you do not, the postal authorities will tax us for their notification.

## CONTENTS

	Page
DREAMS AND REALITIES .....	83
THE FAMILY .....	85
THE MISSIONS MARCH ON .....	86

## ===== Dreams and Realities =====



His Excellency Archbishop Spellman, Bishop Michaud, W.F., some White Fathers, with the Bannabikira "Daughters of Mary" and Brothers of Blessed Charles Lwanga, when the Archbishop visited Uganda in 1942.

**B**WANDA! . . . How I wish you could know it and love it as I do! It is now my "home" and you know all that means. It is not the Mission-field as I had dreamt of it and fancied it in the days of my youth. Long ago, I had dreamt of catechizing at least all the pagans of Equatorial Africa; of baptizing hundreds of people; of a little hut in a peaceful banana plantation. . . But that was a dream,—and the truth is that I am teaching about Methods and Complicated Fractions and Areas, and the Circulation of the Blood, and plants, insects and all the beasts of Creation, besides a number of other things, the teaching of which actually needs preparation. I am at the Primary Teachers' Training Centre. All that remains of my old dream is the banana plantation . . . and it is not too peaceful.

Bwanda is 80 miles from busy Kampala. It is still wild, very primitive, surrounded by plantations; no telephone, no electric light, no aeroplanes, no busses, no radio . . . far from the main road. It is part of the paradise of my dream. But Bwanda is also quite an important village, and quite a busy place.

There is, first of all, the Motherhouse of the Native Sisters; their Novitiate, a Sanatorium, a Junior School, comprising 150 persons; the Boarding school, with its 90 pupils, (the day pupils are about 80). Side of the Normal School, there are the five Preparatory Classes where eighty girls are being coached for the Training Centre. These classes are called: Classes III, IV, V, and Preparatory VI and VII. Last but not least, in a very fine, new and modern building are the three classes of the Training Centre, where 33 pupils are registered. All the subjects are taken in English; most of the girls are keen on learning it. In the highest class, the girls have to practice English on their own. Examination Papers are written in English. The first attempts at using English, three years ago, proved hard but also it was worth trying.

It is holiday-time now. The Boarders and the Preparatory Classes are gone home, but the Students of the Training Centre remain in Bwanda throughout August. They cultivate a little, rest a great deal and work at apparatus and charts.

During the Summer months three Re-

treats take place. The Native Sisters from three Vicariates: Buganda, Rwenzori and Buddu, come to attend these Retreats. This means more work than usual for us; umbrellas need mending, watches to be put into working order, books to bind, pictures to paste; I enjoy these holidays in the silent atmosphere of the Retreats.

At the beginning of the holidays I had the great pleasure of visiting a really poor, primitive Mission, the one of my old dream. I went to Narozari, some forty miles from here, across virgin forests, past huge palm trees, gigantic ferns, enormous baobabs and tenacious climbers that looked like green snakes, binding branches and trunks together. And I enjoyed these all the more when I was told that they were the home of pythons and leopards.

We reached Narozari at midday. It is one of the oldest Catholic Missions and one of the most interesting. From the Native Priests' house, high up on the crest of a hill, we have a splendid view: plantations, palms, the bush with some little thatched huts, and further, the majestic forests with the great lake shining beyond like a mirror.

We had no time to lose, so could not admire to our hearts' content. From behind every tree and every blade of grass sprung up a little Blackie, grey with dust, half wrapped in something that looked like a rag full of holes, but a smile such as theirs I had never seen before.

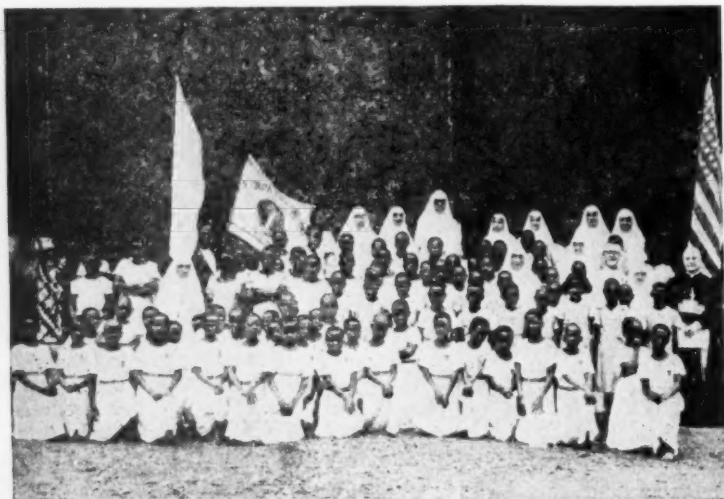
The people of the place are as simple,

gentle and polite as in the olden days. They had never yet met "White Sisters." They knelt in front of us looking with large, curious eyes; open-mouthed in their astonishment and admiration. When some two hundred had collected, they shouted their best welcomes and wishes with exquisite smiles and great enthusiasm.

We were then taken to Church in procession. It was poor and miserable, the home of bats, birds and cockroaches. I spent that quarter of an hour devising what I could do with a thousand dollars, if I had them, and wishing I could give Our Lord a more respectable and a neater dwelling.

Again the procession formed, and this time it led us to the Native Sisters. They had prepared lunch for us in their best room:—the dinner of my old dream in the dark, low, small room I had dreamt of. A table too high and a stool too low; one plate for two and one pocket-knife. Lunch was really good: a fowl cooked in banana leaves, a delightful 'matoke' (bananas steamed in banana leaves,) an enormous pumpkin, fruit, etc. All was perfect, except that there was but one plate and one pocket-knife for two. After five minutes struggle with the hen, we secured a leg each and that was excellent. The natives are very skillful and clean when eating with their fingers, and I thought it was easy. But our first trial was not a success. Matoke should be eaten burning hot. After we succeeded in taking a little lump, and

( Please turn to page 90 )



Archbishop  
Spellman meets  
Sr. Mathias  
Kalembe\* whilst  
visiting St.  
Teresa's School,  
Kisubi.

---

\*Sr. Mathias  
Kalembe is from  
Massachusetts.



Scenery in North Africa.

## The Family

**D**OES FAMILY LIFE really exist among the Mussulmen?

This is a complex question and it is with some hesitation that I propose to answer it.

It is not intended here to give a complete and general study of this vast and complicated subject but to offer a few comments on the customs and lives of these people that we have observed.

Family life does exist among them, though of course, not the Christian idealism that we know and which materialism has not, as yet, succeeded to destroy.

Less intimate in its conjugal relationships, but stronger on the other hand in the relations between one generation and another. The emancipation which came to the child on reaching his majority does not dispense him, now become father or grandfather, from obeying the authority of the Sheik, the Head of the family. This respect of paternal authority weakened in the cities because of the influence of European ideas heard in cafes or read in the newspapers, still remains intact under the tents of the nomad tribes and in the huts of the tillers of the soil.

In this country where marriage is contracted prematurely, new generations succeed each other rapidly and the desire of seeing one's children's children, even to the fourth generation, is realized more often here than in our country.

One fine old woman we met the other day was very bravely rearing her great-grandchildren, whose mother had died, and was still making little brushes from dwarf palms, in order to contribute to their upkeep. The old woman knew how to

make them respect her rights, as she stood there, stick in hand, angrily threatening the little imps in the courtyard. And I really think her bark was worse than her bite, for soon her wrinkled face beamed with a broad smile which alas! no longer showed the white teeth of her youth long since fled.

Another time the four generations on the female side were gathered at the Dispensary, and even though it is an accepted theory that the Arabian woman ages rapidly, the freshness of this great grandmother made her the envy of young and old alike.

\*\*\*\*\*

In spite of the high death rate among the infants, the Arabs, especially those who live far from the city, have large families.

The fathers love their children very much, the girls as well as the boys, for they do not have the exaggerated preference for the boys so common among the Kabyles. Did not one of them call his daughter "The sun of the farm?" And one could see the tenderness in his eyes and the love in his heart for that sun.

Those who still adhere to the old custom and do not permit their wives to appear on the streets, bring the baby to the dispensary themselves. Their clumsy and awkward tenderness is truly touching.

In the basket of his bicycle an ingenious father built a little cradle, complete even to the white curtains. It resembles a "bassour"? used by the nomads for the

( Please turn to page 88 )





# THE

Art work

Made by

the Children.

**January 13th, 1944**—Four Sisters bid farewell to the Motherhouse and set out for the foundation of a new hospital for the Natives at **Adrar** in the Sahara.

\*\*\*\*\*

**At Carthage in Tunisia**—our boarding school being still occupied as a military hospital—the mission works, schools, workroom, dispensary, are carried on in temporary shelters here and there. Not only has the attendance been maintained but it has increased, as at Sidi-Bou-Said where the children come more numerous than ever.

\*\*\*\*\*

A Boarding School for Moslem girls has been opened at La Marsa (in Tunisia). The workroom which usually functioned there has been transferred to Marsa City, where it is a combined school and workroom.

\*\*\*\*\*

**At Bizerte (Tunisia)** the Sisters are now reaping the fruits of their courageous perseverance for remaining in the ruined and deserted city. The Natives are coming back and the Dispensary is busier than ever.

\*\*\*\*\*

We were sorry to learn the death of Dr. Villemonte de la Clergerie famous eye-specialist of Algiers, who devoted himself for many years at our Ophthalmic Clinic

for the Natives. He it was who initiated many of our Sisters to Ophthalmic Science. The air raid of November 22nd, 1942 and the destruction of the Clinic was a great blow to him—how he longed for its reopening. May God rest this great lay-apostle.

\*\*\*\*\*

The Sisters who left the Motherhouse December 13th, for West Africa reached Dakar on the 27th. The news of their safe arrival came with that of a new foundation at **Bobo-Dioulasso**.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Mother Mechtilde wrote from Bwanda, Uganda:**

In the course of 1943 the Bannabikira (Native Sisters of Uganda) have had a General Chapter of the Congregation. As Reverend Mother Ursula's time was up, and she is quite worn out, a new Superior General was chosen from among the older Sisters. The Assistant General is a younger member of the Community, Sister Terezia who was in charge of the Novitiate for seven years.

The Bannabikira now have foundations in four Vicariates: Uganda, Rwenzori,



Gymnasium is in the s

# THE MISSIONS MARCH ON



Masaka, and Gulu (this latter mention was the Verona Fathers' territory in pre-World War II days.)

Besides, Mother Mechtilde also refers to the intensifying of English studies on the School Programme. This is the topic of the present article "Dreams and Realities."

\*\*\*\*\*

On October 13th, 1943 a new foundation of White Sisters was made at Kakonko in the Tanganyika Vicariate. It was placed under the protection of Our Lady of Peace.

This mission station was long desired by Bishop Van Sambeck—but due to lack of reinforcement, since the outbreak of the war, it could not take place. All the Sisters could do in the meantime was to go and stay there for a few weeks during vacation time. Divine Providence played into the Bishop's hands. The Holy Father wanted White Sisters to replace the Italian missionaries in Ethiopia. Sisters were chosen from here and there, from the older missions for the purpose.



in the school curriculum.

As far as is known they are still waiting for civil authorities to enter the said territory. When hopes to enter the country dropped low the Bishop again pleaded the cause of Kakonko and won.

However the foundation was hardly launched when news came from the Apostolic Delegation for the Sisters to get ready to answer the Holy Father's demand. Kakonko could no longer be abandoned. Despite the shortage of laborers caused by the departure for this new mission territory, the missionaries are doing their utmost **to hold the place** until further reinforcement may reach them.

\*\*\*\*\*

From all the Missions comes the news that all is well. The good God is miraculously providing the daily bread for His missionaries. Against all odds of times, the mission works are kept up and new creations come to life.

## *An Arab Proverb*

To teach an old man is to write on water  
but to teach a child is to write on stone.

*Subscribe for a friend = See back cover*

Our  
American Boys  
"snapped"  
our faithful  
little workers  
somewhere  
in Tunisia.



---

## The Family

[ Continued from page 85 ]

---

women who ride on the camel's back hidden from indiscreet eyes.

Unhappily, these poor fathers are the victims of a strange custom which will not permit them to enjoy their offspring during the first days of its existence. They must wait seven days before being accorded the privilege of seeing their own child and then it is only after it has been ransomed by the new mother that they may do so.

Another custom strictly enforced is the interdiction for a husband to see his wife in the presence of his parents, either the father or the mother. This gives rise to a series of mysterious and strange maneuvers which can not be understood by an unacquainted visitor.

We were visiting a family one day when the Sheik entered, a venerable old man who is the ancestor of all the inhabitants on this hill. At his appearance the young woman got up and hid herself in an obscure corner.

"Are you afraid of your grandfather?" I asked her, intrigued and mystified. She made stealthy signs to indicate the negative but did not say a word.

Charity brings out "motherly love."



After the departure of the Sheik I dared to ask an explanation which she now gave me in the presence of her husband.

This same scene was repeated in another home in the presence of a mother-in-law.

"Sidi" a voice from the interior warned and the young woman to whom I was speaking immediately vanished from sight.

What worry and inconvenience it is for these poor women to submit to these exacting and complicated customs in their everyday family life. European customs, thus far, have succeeded to modify these but very little.

\* \* \* \* \*

I do not think that in the intimacy of her home the Arabian woman is in general, the slave, the oppressed being that we sometimes imagine her to be. That which to us seems to be rigid constraint comes perfectly natural to them. For those who have not as yet been attained by the example of European emancipation and have not been perverted by treacherous advice as that which I once heard on a train, their lot is not too oppressive.

There are, alas, exceptions to this rule as I myself can verify having seen a nomade woman teamed with an ass to pull a glough, a picture which is often given as typical of the Arabian woman. I knew a man too who tied his wife in the stable with the mule. Needless to say she did not submit very long but broke a window and fled.

Whether it be in Tunisia, Algeria or the Sahara, in a palace with marble columns and bubbling fountains, in huts made from reeds or under the fragile shelter of a tent, if the surroundings differ and local customs take on a different appearance, the mussulman household is essentially the same as it is based on the same code, the unchangeable book of the Coran.

The young girls are married or to use the native expression, "bought" after the negotiations, in which she has not been consulted, have been concluded. She arrives at the conjugal abode bedecked as a little queen. Also she is almost always a complete stranger unknown to her husband who at least in principle, has never seen her.

Can we at home imagine what strange surprise this first encounter must be? And



can we be astounded, after such a beginning, that divorces are numerous especially during the first years of married life?

The young girl, still a child, is much too young to assume her tasks in earnest and with persevering solicitude. In some localities in the majority of cases, she loses her first baby and several others.

The matrimonial bond is very weak and it is broken with the least strain, as in the case of this native.

"I sent my wife away," he told me, "she didn't want to do anything but play."

"How old was she?"

"Twelve years old," he answered.

What are the young girls at home doing at that age?

Divorces later on are less frequent and the wife, now the mother of several children, in order to keep peace in her home, leans more upon her rights as mother than her position as wife.

\* \* \* \* \*

In the intimacy of the Arabian home family life exists to a greater extent than can be imagined by those who cannot penetrate into Moslem society as we Missionaries do. The father, at the end of a days work, sits happily among his children while the mother is still busy with her household tasks.

The family table which symbolizes for us union of hearts and souls certainly does not stand in the center of the gourbi or the tent where it would produce the strange effect of an object out of place. The father and the older boys eat together seated on the floor around the "maida," a low round table, while the women of the family must wait until the men have finished before they are permitted to eat.

The smaller children are pampered and by coaxingly placing their heads in the father's laps, they are able to obtain anything. These little children are the masters of the household, a little too much so. None dares to cross them or to make them cry, even their fathers cede to their every desire. Their early education suffers from this lack of discipline and it takes a long time to reform them on this point.

One father, who strings Arabian beads in Tunis, tried to defend his paternal authority in our presence when his five year old daughter refused to let him take the fan with which she had been playing. Red with anger, quite unawed she caught her

father's wide Arab trousers and clung to it with all her strength. It was a funny scene and the abashed papa found, in our smiles, an excuse to give in to his spoiled baby.

The day that the fathers probably take the greatest pride in their offspring is on the feast of "Aid Essrir," which brings to a close the Moslem Lent. All dressed up in new clothes of velvet and vegetable silk, with many ribbons and much gilt, the fathers parade their children on the streets like some obliging cock who has agreed to marshall a brood of chicks. They make their way through the crowds, calling greetings and congratulating each other on their families, while their women remain home alone not being permitted to appear on the crowded streets.

It makes a charming picture to see them in the square "Bab Souika" before the mosque Halfaouine (Tunis) where the fair is at its peak with the swings and teter-toters, and the wooden horses on merry-go-rounds.

\* \* \* \* \*

When the sons grow up they do not leave the paternal hearth. In the "ouest dar" a room is luxuriously furnished to receive the little "arroussa" (bride).

On the farms a new house is built in the "haouch" (settlement). A new nest for a new couple, and so families remain together.

In the "douars" around Algiers new villages have sprung up in this way, hidden in the fold of the hills, with their picturesque enclosure of prickly pears. They form the tribes, whose names are familiar along the black twisting lines which mark the winding trails on the road maps.

\* \* \* \* \*

The family remains nevertheless, in spite of divorce, an efficient force in Islam and is a powerful protective barrier for their beliefs and traditions.

Sister George Marie, W.S.

---

---

*In Thanksgiving to Our Lady of Africa.*

For Recovery of health:

Mr. and Mrs. R. Belcourt, Manchester, N. H.

---

---

# We Need YOU All



*Please help us by becoming a Missionary Sister. Fill in the following blank and mail to*

Reverend Mother Superior,  
319 Middlesex Avenue, Metuchen, New Jersey.

Dear Mother Superior:

I am interested in Missionary life, please send me information.

Signed Name: .....

Address: .....

=====

*Please help us by using this subscription blank.*

White Sisters Convent,  
319 Middlesex Avenue, Metuchen, New Jersey.

1 Year ..... \$1.00  
6 Years ..... \$5.00

Dear Mother Superior:

I am enclosing \$ ..... for which please list a subscription to the  
Messenger of Our Lady of Africa.

Name .....

Address .....

=====

